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As Arms Buildup Eases, U.S. Tries to Take Stock

By BILL KELLER

A new political reality has begun to sink in at the Pentagon: The biggest peacetime military buildup in modern American history is coming to an end, and the nation is asking whether it has been getting its money's worth.

After four years and appropriations of more than \$1,007,900,000,000 — that is, one trillion, seven billion, nine hundred million dollars — Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger says he has resigned himself to supporting a level of military spending he describes as "maintenance."

Both houses of Congress have, in effect, told him in recent days that he would fall considerably short of that because the popular mandate for higher military budgets has disappeared.

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Scant Attention to Strategy

Congress, some members say, gave its blessing to budgets with little discussion of the underlying strategy.

"The Pentagon announced it wanted a 600-ship Navy and sent up a succession of budgets consistent with that," said Representative Les Aspin of Wisconsin, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. "But as far as I know, we never gave 15 minutes' debate to the subject of a 600-ship Navy."

Adjusted for inflation, the military budget has grown an average of nearly 9 percent a year. The Central Intelligence Agency estimates that Soviet military spending, adjusted for inflation, has grown about 2 percent a year since 1976.

The spending by the United States was heavily skewed to equipment. From 1960 to 1983, "investment," which includes weapons procurement, research and military construction, grew 92 percent, even after adjusting for inflation. It now consumes 47 percent of the military budget.

By comparison, military pay increased 12 percent.

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